Undertow

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/8699404.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warnings:	No Archive Warnings Apply, Rape/Non-Con
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal (TV), Jagten | The Hunt (2012)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Lucas (Jagten), Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham/Wendigo
Characters:	Will Graham, Lucas (Jagten), Alana Bloom, Freddie Lounds, Hannibal Lecter, Abigail Hobbs, Jack Crawford
Additional Tags:	Angst, Depression, dark fantasies, Vertigo (Hitchcock) References, hannigram AU, Post-Episode: s02e13 Mizumono, Vertigo Inspired
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of Reflections
Stats:	Published: 2016-11-30 Completed: 2017-02-10 Words: 20,607 Chapters: 2/2

Undertow

by clicktrack_heart

Summary

Will meets Lucas (Jagten/The Hunt) post Mizumono.

Notes

The Reflections series is me playing with potential facets of Will Graham's character post-Mizumono, using characters of Lucas and Nigel. You do not need to read the Nigel/Will series to understand this part. It's set in same universe but different story focused on Will/Lucas.

I had so. much. help. with this. Seriously. Where to begin? Thank you TheBeesPatella for always making me think of ways to make something better and saving me from bad writing, WeConqueratDawn for editing and being so wonderful, and CannibalCuisine whose incredibly kind encouragement saved this from the computer trash bin.

See the end of the work for more notes

Can't Fight the Undertow

X

Time was lost between old cranks and freshly oiled gears. The hours passed that way in general for Will, more often than it did not.

His boat's machinery was easier than the exercises his physical therapist had printed out for him anyway, and mechanic work didn't come with the heavy price that FBI work had exacted on his body and mind.

It didn't matter if he didn't know where the boat would take him yet, did it? Not now.

Every now and then, Abigail came and sat with him outside in the dirt, battered jeans and leather boots neatly scuffing the ground.

He explained the parts he worked on, the role and importance that it would play during a long sea voyage. Abigail listened for short periods, wandering off with the dogs as she pleased or when Will had finally bored her.

Neither of them spoke of lunch or the fact that Abigail was dead.

Gradually, the late day became crisp and pale, cold enough that a shiver danced down his back when the phone rang.

Will answered it. He shouldn't have.

"I got something you'll want to see," Jack said, on the other line.

"No," Will said, but he set down his wrench, staring bleary eyed at the boat motor parts that surrounded him. Abigail was gone again. "I told you I'm not interested in your evil minds anymore."

"How about Hannibal Lecter's evil mind? Any interest left there?"

Will froze, nails digging into palms.

"You found him?"

"Not exactly," Jack hedged. "We found someone who looks like he could be his twin."

The breath that Will held was released in an angry puff. "So? He's not. Did you ever bother to read Hannibal's profile, Jack? He only had one sibling, a sister."

Will wasn't entirely *lucid* about a lot these days, but that Hannibal had told the truth about his family, he was certain. The end of their time together had come with a sort of painful honesty, a mutual mea culpa-- too little, too late.

Mischa had never been questioned.

“Well, my guy could be a cousin then, or something,” Jack said, impatience and desperation giving a rougher quality to his confident bluster. “You need to see this to believe it.”

“Wow, Jack, it’s almost like you care.” A smile twisted Will’s lips. “Only I can think of better ways to spend my time than judging a lookalike contest for the man who gutted me.”

He nearly hung up then but Jack had started to speak. Will hesitated, just long enough.

“I promise you Will, I've never seen anything like this,” Jack said. “This man -- Lucas, he's Hannibal’s spitting image, and personality wise, his polar opposite. I am extending you a professional courtesy here. Don't let it slip away. I trust your insight to tell me if this is significant. I need your help.”

Again. It was unspoken but inferred all the same.

Will snorted. He stared at the parts of his boat motor without really seeing them. His mind was miles away, over sea and mountains. In the hallowed halls of the Cappella Palatina, where he dared not hope that Hannibal waited.

“Send me everything you have so far,” Will said. He would indulge Jack, but on his terms. “And stop pretending there's anything professional about this. It’s -- unbecoming.”

X

The files had come, emailed over by some nameless assistant of Jack’s. He even received a grainy photocopy of a (purportedly) Danish passport. The drive over had been faster than the law permitted but still it wasn’t enough.

Nothing could have prepared him for this.

Will stood still as marble in the dark viewing room at the BAU.

Beyond the two-way mirror was the face of Will’s dreams and nightmares – a choked scream given life, damp fingers scrabbling in the dark. The same wolfish face and scarred eyes that had only seemed real to him with a tender hand on the side of his face and a knife slow-waltzing in his gut.

He still remembered the muted sound of blood slipping out of his body, a whisper like rain across Hannibal’s Italian leather shoes. *Hannibal.*

The man he saw now had the same face, but that was it. It wasn’t just the white blood-spattered shirt he was missing, but the sneer, the haughty precision – it was all gone. Hidden in irresolution and patched tweed.

Will swallowed the knot building in his throat.

The man that Jack had summoned him to see, the one who was supposedly the spitting image of Hannibal Lecter, was every bit the harried professor with his patched jacket and wire

frame glasses. He looked like almost every professor Will had in grad school. Will knew, though he couldn't explain why, that this was not an act. The man was innocent. And he was most assuredly not Hannibal.

He was normal, unremarkable. Plain where Hannibal had been dandy, drab where Hannibal had been eye catching. Nervous where Hannibal would've been calculating, assured in his own elegance.

Now that Will could concentrate, he could see this man's hair was darker, more youthful, unstyled and falling in his eyes in a way Hannibal would not abide. He was at least five years younger. And while his suit had probably been nice once upon a time, now it was shabby, uncared for. There was a slight tremor to his shoulders -- he was trembling.

The mere coldness of the BAU had damaged him.

Poor little wounded bird.

Will startled only when Jack came out of the interrogation room, his mouth pursed to a hard frown.

"He doesn't know our man. Probably not even related. Damn it! I should have known."

Will took a breath, licked his dry lips.

"What did he say?"

"That he's not Hannibal," said Jack. "He's a school-teacher from Denmark, Will. Everything he said came back clean. He agreed to whatever we wanted, DNA testing and lie detectors. And -- I believe him."

Will let that sink in. He felt the old flare of resentment towards Jack, knew it would never go away, not completely. "Then I hope you didn't break him too bad."

Jack gave him a sharp look. "He'll do fine. This isn't the first time he's been accused of something he was innocent of. All things considered, it is an interesting story."

"I read the files," Will said.

"The resemblance though, it's uncanny," Jack said. "How do you explain that? They could've been twins."

They looked into the two way mirror, this time together.

Lucas was still now, the long, lean lines of his body slumped. His hands were clasped together as if in prayer. Unnameable emotion churned inside the void of Will's stomach, that this stranger would wear Hannibal's face but not wear his blood…

"They do say everyone has a twin out there right?" Jack muttered beside him. "That man there must be Hannibal's."

Will frowned, staring into the dim mirror.

“Let me go in,” he said.

Jack tensed. “Will.”

Will bowed his head slightly. “I came all this way on your word, Jack. I should get a crack at him. To at least confirm your assessment. You said you wanted my insight.”

Jack exhaled. His expression was torn. “That I did.”

Jack laced his fingers behind his back, thinking to himself. He came to his decision as impulsively as he always did.

“Fine. You get five minutes. Just remember, he’s on your watch now. You break it, you buy it.”

Oh, I intend to.

X

Lucas twitched when Will came in, the heavy door slamming shut behind him. His shudders were almost imperceptible now but Will could still see.

“Are you cold?” Will asked. “They have blankets.”

Lucas looked up at him, blinking his surprise. “No. I am -- I am fine.”

So their voices were similar -- quiet and intelligent -- though the accents were nothing alike.

Will paused, allowing himself a few seconds to settle into the room, to acclimate himself to Lucas’s looks, his presence. Up close, he was more attractive than the two-way mirror had let on. Handsome but different, his face was angular and lean--haggard in the way of someone who doesn’t sleep as much as they should. There was something rugged about him as well, his face was tan as though he spent a fair amount of time outdoors. His hands were certainly weathered enough. His hands were more like his than Hannibal's, Will mused.

Lucas steeled himself at Will’s examination, his back straightening. He regarded Will with almost the same amount of curiosity, tempered only by his fear.

Will sat down across from him.

“I’m Will Graham,” he said. “I’m an occasional consultant for the FBI. You should know that everything you’ve said so far has checked out.”

“Then why am I still here?”

“Have you been interrogated before?”

“Yes. Many times.”

Will nodded. “Yes, it’s all part of a-- procedure. They don’t just ask you the questions once, they have to do it again and again until everything in your mind is a blur. And you start to think, well maybe I don’t know what happened then, where I was exactly or what I said or did.”

“My mind is not blurred about being a serial killer. Nor who I am.”

“Good,” Will said. “Remember that. I have a few questions for you. Can you tell me, when you’re ready, what you were interrogated about previously, back in Denmark?”

Lucas hesitated, lowering his eyes. “A year ago, I was accused of doing something, something horrible with a child at the school where I worked. I did not do it.”

Will was unable to stop his chuckle. Lucas startled, his expression one of horror and shock.

“Sorry,” Will said, giving him a small, sheepish smile. “It’s just that the same thing has happened to me.”

Will could practically feel Jack’s cringe on the other side of the mirror but he pushed on with Lucas’ rapt attention. “Not the same crime as you, but I was accused of killing several people, mutilating them, and keeping *parts* of them as trophies. Turns out it was my psychiatrist who was doing it. He was -- my friend, at the time.”

Lucas absorbed this with wide eyes.

“What happened to you?”

“Hannibal Lecter happened to me. The same reason you’re here now.”

Lucas didn’t react, save for the small crease between his eyebrows.

“Dr. Hannibal Lecter,” Will repeated, slowly. “Ever heard that name before today?”

Lucas shook his head, straightening slightly in his seat. “No.”

“Ever been to Lithuania?”

Lucas shook his head again. “Only Denmark and now the U.S. Once to London for a teaching convention.”

“You still teach?”

“No.”

“Why not? You were deemed innocent of those charges.”

Lucas looked doubtfully at him from under the dark sweep of his eyelashes. “How would you know? You don’t know me.”

“I know this,” Will said. “It’s why I do what I do. Plus, I have the files from your hearing, I know all about the little girl with the schoolgirl crush. The basement--or lack of one. You tried to help her, didn’t you? You were innocent. You should have gone back to class and showed them all.”

“It wasn’t like that,” Lucas said. He frowned, struggling with his words. “I-- it was… I couldn’t just-- It wasn’t about showing someone.”

“What was it then? What drove you, if not revenge?”

“It was -- when I was much younger I thought I could make a positive difference in a child’s life. I don’t believe that anymore.”

“Your life was changed,” Will said. “Not theirs.”

Lucas looked at him with surprise before nodding. “Yes.”

“Why did you turn up in Dulles airport, Lucas? Long way from home.”

“I- I wanted to go on a vacation. My brother--”

“Bruun,” Will supplied. He already knew this, having briefed himself during the traffic stops on the drive over, papers over steering wheel, foot heavy on the gas pedal.

“Yes,” Lucas said, still guarded. “Bruun suggested Washington D.C. for a vacation, a respite, I believe you would call it. He has a friend that does diplomatic work who offered to let me stay at his apartment. We were all friends once, when we were children.”

To Will, the association came freely, yet heavy as the brick and mortar that sealed Fortunato.

“Even an hour spent with someone from your past would feel like suffocation, wouldn’t it?” he asked. “Food growing cold, jokes staler than the sweat on your back. You’d be alone the entire time, even in the welcoming home of a childhood friend. He would never understand what you’ve been through. Few people can understand or even accept that life can be so painful. They don’t want to believe it.”

“I just wanted to be alone,” Lucas said. His voice quivered. “With people who don’t know me. Who can’t even speak my language. It’s not a crime.”

“It's not,” Will said, firm but as gentle as he could. He changed the subject abruptly. “Could you please tell me where you’re staying now?”

Lucas made a sound that was more of a choke than a laugh. “I already told—”

“Again,” Will said. “Please.”

Their eyes met for a long moment. Lucas looked away first, rubbing the stubbled line of his jaw.

“Ah, yes, *procedure*,” he said. “I forgot, the day has been long.” He took two steady breaths. “I am staying at the Capitol Hill Hotel.”

Will gave a low whistle. “Nice part of town.”

Lucas fidgeted his hands. “I was told it was quiet. Respectful.”

“Depends on your tastes.”

His eyebrows rose, confusion crossing his face. “Pardon? I am not sure I understand.”

“A little advice?” Will offered.

“Yes,” Lucas said, quietly. “Please.”

“You look a lot like Hannibal Lecter-- you’re practically a mirror image,” Will said. “He’s a wanted man with a lot of enemies. So don’t talk to strangers who think they know you, no matter what. Wear a hat and your glasses when you can… stick with the tweed as much as possible. Just be careful during the rest of your stay here.”

“Do you mean my stay with the FBI?”

“The FBI is ready to let you go, Lucas.”

“Let me go,” Lucas repeated dully. His voice registered only disbelief.

“No evidence to keep you here,” Will said. “You’re free to leave at your leisure. You haven’t done anything wrong. I’m sorry the beginning of your vacation was such a—clusterfuck.”

Lucas stared at him as though he was a puzzle with a missing center. It didn't bother Will, he was used to being seen as missing a few pieces, especially when Lucas lifted his chin with a sort of wounded pride that Will found that he *liked*, very much. Like a ripened fruit, there was just a little more skin to peel back before he found its flesh.

Will hesitated, he had to be careful here, Jack was still listening after all. He maintained eye contact with Lucas, longer than he could normally stand. Again, he saw Lucas’ curiosity, a hint of interest in Will now -- intrigued to meet someone like him.

When Lucas’ gaze flicked almost absently to Will’s mouth, Will wet his lips with precise slowness.

“You look like you need a drink,” he said. “Since you’re new in town, may I suggest Tim’s Rivershore Restaurant? Right off the highway. Decent seafood. The beer is always cold.”

He and Alana had met there a few times for lunch and it was unlikely to be crowded at this time of night.

Lucas nodded slowly, furrowing his brow. Will had no idea if his insinuation was understood at all.

Their eyes met though, even longer this time.

“Thank you Agent Graham,” Lucas said. “For your help.”

Will got up from his chair, offering his hand.

Lucas took it. Their hands came together with just the slightest pressure, warm and calloused, lingering a second too long.

Will wondered what Lucas saw in him besides a person who could share his misery. Was it pity? A stray dog by the side of the road, staring back at him with hungry eyes?

“I believe Agent Crawford will show you out,” Will said. “Take care.”

Lucas nodded and Will left, the feel of Lucas’ hand still buzzing along his skin.

He went to the staff lounge so Jack could finish out his interview. He had a half full cup of Keurig coffee sludge when Jack came into the room, signaling that Lucas was gone.

Stress and anxiety lined Jack's face, untried restraint as fresh as the pink knife scar on his neck.

“I hope you know what you’re doing.”

Will rolled his eyes. He drank from his Styrofoam cup, making a face at the bitter taste.

“I still know how to fish,” he said. “Without your help.”

“Yeah well, I'm giving up on Hannibal. Officially.”

Will decided to not even dignify the lie with a response.

“How is Bella?” he asked instead.

“In hospice care for good now but we’re lucky that we got her transferred home. She is slowly suffocating on lung fluid and the lack of variety of stains on the ceiling from the comfort of our bedroom.”

Will swallowed, his throat clicking absurdly loud in the empty employee kitchen. He poured his coffee in the sink, crumpled his cup for the trash bin.

I know the feeling, he didn't say.

A part of him wanted to trade places with Bella. Was envious. To unzip his skin to his insides, six feet underground. A skull always looked like it was smiling, didn’t it.

A teacup didn't have to come back together. Not if it didn’t want to.

Not if there were other places to let go of his virulence.

“I’m glad Bella’s home,” was all Will could offer Jack.

X

Will didn't go into the diner right away. He parked in the gravel parking lot outside, comfortable in the quiet dark.

There were five other cars parked around him and two were clearly rentals. One was too showy, some sort of overpriced convertible, probably some Fed trying to make a point, the other was a dark grey Subaru Forester. Will focused on that.

He smiled.

Subtle but efficient. Completely practical in a way Hannibal could not be—Will told himself he didn't care.

He was taking a big bet even showing up at the diner. Jack hadn't called him out on it but that didn't mean he didn't have his suspicions. Let him have them, he thought. The scales might be Even-Steven, or perhaps tipped on Jack's side for who was owed more but Will wasn't going to let that stop him. He had buried the hatchet in a shallow grave for a reason.

He had enough time to reminisce. He locked his car and headed to the restaurant. An unfamiliar waitress with ebony skin and doe eyes told him to take a seat wherever he liked.

He scanned the small homey room, the rounded tables that were mostly empty, the rows of benches at the back, almost to the fire exit. There was a lone couple in one and then on the other side of that sat Lucas.

The man had spotted him as soon as he came in. He was still wearing his glasses and the same tweed blazer. He already had a frosted mug of beer in front of him.

Will made his way over.

"I wasn't sure you would come," Will said, by way of greeting.

"I'm Danish, not stupid."

Will laughed a little at that. It felt good but strange, curling at his mouth the way it did. "Sorry, you're right. I haven't traveled much out of the U.S. myself," he said, taking a seat across from Lucas. "You're my first Dane."

Lucas choked on his sip of beer, clearing his throat hastily. "Ah, but you have traveled?"

"To Mexico and Canada," Will said. "For work. In the U.S., I've been pretty much everywhere, growing up."

Their waitress came then and took Will's order for a beer. He asked for the same thing Lucas was drinking.

Once she left them to check on another table, Lucas stared at Will uncertainly.

“If there’s something you want to know, just ask,” Will said. “You’ve been grilled all day, you should be able to return the favor.”

“I would like to know, why did you want to see me again?” Lucas asked. “Was it business or… something else? Did you want to share more horror stories of false accusations?”

“I was curious,” Will said simply. “And not just because of our shared history in false accusations from our nearest and dearest.” Lucas stared at him so intently that Will could feel his own face grow warm and flushed, but even then he didn’t look away. *Let him see,* he thought.

“Why?” Lucas asked finally. “I’m not that interesting. Because I remind you of -- your friend?”

“Because I wanted to have a beer with you.”

Just then, the waitress came back with Will’s drink. They focused on her, both relieved at the interruption. Will read the cursive lettering on her name tag, Tara.

“How about some hush puppies to go with the brews, gentlemen?” she asked them. “We do them homemade.”

“Hush puppies?” Lucas asked. He gave Will a worried look.

Will laughed, smiling at Tara. “Yes, please. We’ll take an order.”

The waitress nodded and wandered off, leaving Will to explain the appetizer.

“It’s deep fried cornmeal,” Will said. “A lot of people like them.”

“Do you?” Lucas’ arched his brow doubtfully.

“Yes, most people do, especially if they’re from the south.”

“Is that where you’re from?”

“My roots, if they could be called that, are strongest in Louisiana. But I followed my father from the boatyards of Biloxi and Greenville to lake boats on Erie.”

“And in these boats, you would eat, these, these huge puppies?”

“Heh, hush puppies!” Will said. “Not huge.”

Lucas laughed at Will's reaction, his tension easing slightly. Will took a long sip of his beer, licking the foam from his lips. “I love dogs but I don’t eat ‘em.”

He couldn’t help but think of all the meals Hannibal had prepared for him, beautiful, rich feasts, the succulent smell of roasted meats that whet his palate each time. Every bite as pleasing to the eye as it was to the tongue. “It’s good to draw the line somewhere.”

Lucas smiled distantly. “Of course for dogs. They are our best friends. Do you have a dog?”

“I used to find strays and try to give them a home,” Will said. “I had seven dogs at one point. Most were mutts I found wandering on roads, highways. Two I got from a kill-shelter. Missed them a lot when I was incarcerated.”

“I had one dog, her name was Fanny. She was like a child to me for many years.”

“Tell me about her.”

Lucas leaned back in his seat, thinking.

“When I got Fanny, she was a Christmas present for my boy. He wanted a pony really, I’m not sure why my wife and I thought a dog would appease him.”

“I can see how he might be disappointed. Was he eventually okay with the switch?”

Lucas took another sip of his beer. “I suppose? He doesn’t talk about horses these days, more video games and girls. The only time I ever yelled at him was on that Christmas day, when he tried to sit on Fanny’s back like she was his pony. Fanny yelped and I- I didn't think, I spanked him. The only time I ever put my hand on him, I swear it.”

“I believe you,” Will said. Lucas just shook his head.

“For the rest of the morning he cried under the tree, even when the carolers came.”

“It wasn’t always like that, I bet. You seem like you’d be a good dad. You were certainly patient with us back at the BAU.”

Lucas lifted his eyes. “I tried.”

“And your son? Did he?”

“Ah, yes, he loved Fanny, as much as I did, and she loved him. He took very good care of her, even when he was barely bigger than she was. And if he had a bad day at school, Fanny always knew before I did. She would find him and curl up in his lap. Even after I was accused she was the only one we had.”

“Dogs are special that way,” Will said. “Mine followed me all the way to the police car when I was arrested.”

“Fanny knew when I needed her too,” Lucas said. He looked away abruptly, tears welling in his eyes. “Then one night, I let her outside and someone killed her. Just bashed in her head with a rock. To punish me. She didn’t deserve that.”

Will could see it, though he didn’t want to.

The dappled dog, lifeless under the porch light. Lucas standing above it, unable to process what he saw.

Will thought of those who had been caught in the crossfire of his own life, innocent and otherwise. Beverly's flesh and muscles neatly sliced between panes of glass, Alana Bloom lying broken beneath the manicured hedges of Hannibal's home. He still remembered begging for Abigail's life in Hannibal's kitchen, blood pulsing hot under his hands, spilling down the front of his pants. He had known he would fail.

"I know what that's like," he said quietly. "You lose -- hope."

"You lose your own life," Lucas said.

"Sometimes, I think, maybe I even deserved it," Will said. "That there's just something that is that wrong about me." He looked at his hands, limp around the half-empty mug. He made a face at his reflection in the glass.

"Sorry, projecting a little much aren't I," Will said, looking at Lucas. "I've been told I lack effective barriers for my thoughts. Associations can be a bit much."

Lucas gazed back, his concern obvious.

"It's just that I'm just not sure that my life was ever anything great. I didn't meant to imply the same for yours," Will added.

"No, you're right," Lucas allowed. "I have thought that, about my wife or Fanny, or at least shades of it."

"Why?"

Lucas shrugged. "My wife took my son had left me before everything happened anyway, my life was far from perfect even before the school investigated me. I went through the motions of my life like a machine would."

"For what it's worth, I'm sorry," Will said.

"Myself, I just feel numb, most of the time," Lucas said. "That you can still feel sorry, after all that has happened, all that was taken from you. That's something."

"I sometimes wonder if there's any other choice," Will said.

They both paused in the dim light. Lucas' eyes were dark but shining. No one in the dinner paid them any mind.

The hush puppies were sampled in comfortable, if not slightly solemn, quiet after Tara brought them their dish. Lucas liked them and it was enough to make Will smile at him, their eyes holding again.

Before the night was over, they exchanged phone numbers.

X

The next day Will managed to take a shower first thing after he woke. It was Sunday and it was only his second time this week bathing himself. The first was yesterday, after Jack called him. Well, it was progress from the week before.

Will had already decided not to call Lucas today. There was something he needed to do first.

He drove to Baltimore after he took the dogs on a long walk around the surrounding fields. The dogs leaped in and out of the mist, like ghosts. The morning was gray, cloudy and cold -- even once he arrived in Hannibal's neighborhood, parking in front of Hannibal's house.

The crime scene tape was long gone but the windows were dark and unwelcoming in a way it had never been when Hannibal had lived there. He supposed it was fitting now. He wondered what kind of stories the realtors would have to tell to sell it, what lies the neighbors told themselves about the gentleman doctor who once lived next door. An outside investor might buy it for a house of horrors.

Crumpled beer cans and a sad looking discarded napkin that resembled a deformed bird more than anything else littered the walkway to the doorway -- tell-tale signs of crime scene gawkers and other deplorables. They wanted to look at death, but they didn't want to understand it. Hard to see what you feared.

He let himself into the house. It opened for him, as if it had been waiting.

The entryway was cold, and there was no smell other than bleach and the distant pungency of other disinfectants. Still, it was the kitchen that called to him the most. It had been scrubbed and cleaned of their sins, but not entirely. He and Abigail had still left their mark.

He chose that spot to sit, leaning against the same kitchen cabinet where he had fallen after Hannibal gutted him.

He had barely taken a breath when the front door slammed. The slam was followed by the lightest squeak of wheels, a sound that reminded Will of a well-oiled bicycle.

Moments later, Alana Bloom wheeled herself into the kitchen. She glanced at him, pursing full red lips. It had been a while since Will had seen her. The last occasion had been at the hospital. She had asked him to leave.

Her expression now was cautious, but not as angry as it had been then. She regarded Will coolly and Will saw that she had changed, the proof was in the severe lines of her makeup and polished clothing. He envied her ability to transform, to paint a new face.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I guess I'm looking for you," she said, quirking her brow as if even she was unsure of her answer.

"That's a good guess."

"What are you doing here?"

“Visiting old friends,” he said, then paused, considering his words as the last memory of the two played out, Hannibal beckoning Abigail close, Will struggling to breathe as blood drained from his body.

“I’m constructing an exhibit in my mind, well-spaced and lighted, keyed to the memories of what happened here,” he said.

“You're not tempted to forget?” Alana asked.

Forgetting had never been an option. He thought of Lucas. All that Hannibal’s likeness could be molded into.

“I don't want to forget. I'm building rooms in my memory palace for all my friends.”

Alana sighed. There was a cautiousness to her pity now, another change that Will took note of. “Friendship is blackmail elevated to the level of love.”

“A mutually-unspoken pact to ignore the worst in one another in order to continue enjoying the best.”

“After everything he's done, can you still ignore the worst in him?”

Will couldn’t imagine what he would do. It was in the dark room of his mind, the end of the map he was constructing. He couldn’t go there now. Not yet.

“I came here to be alone, Alana. If you wouldn't mind.”

He held Alana's gaze until she wheeled away, leaving Will alone. But not really.

When he looked to his side, Abigail was there, leaning against the wall next to him. Her throat gaped, blood still pouring sluggishly from the wound Hannibal had inflicted. She smiled shyly at him.

“You’re back,” Will said.

“And you’re slacking,” she said, poking his shoulder. “Shouldn’t you be working on the boat?”

“Slight change to the schedule,” Will said. He thought of Lucas again, hunched over in the BAU interrogation room, wire frame glasses sagging down the bridge of his nose. “There’s a diversion I need to explore. A road not taken.”

“You really think you’ll find something different for us at the end?”

“I have to try,” Will said. “To know.”

“That’s not for us though, it’s for you.”

Will absorbed that. He couldn’t lie, not about this. Abigail pushed forward, unconcerned with Will’s quiet.

“Lucas can only give you an approximation of what you really want,” Abigail said. “Not reality.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever known reality,” he replied.

Abigail smiled again. The wound in her neck oozed blood.

“Touche,” she said.

Will nodded. He rested his head back against the cabinets and closed his eyes.

When he opened them, Abigail was gone. He touched the space where she had sat with gentle fingers. There was no sign left of her, other than the dark stain of blood on Hannibal’s kitchen floor. Not even the BAU’s cleaning crew could absolve that.

He listened to the long silence. He could no longer hear Alana’s wheelchair rolling down the hall.

Will got up, dusting off the knees of his pants. The house stayed still, eerily so, even as Will ascended the stairs.

Hannibal’s room had clearly been disturbed, drawers were open, clothes spilling out of them. Paintings had been removed from the walls, even the mirror above the foot of his bed was laying flat on the floor. Broken.

Will looked into its dark reflection. He saw Hannibal’s bed -- not himself. It was more presentable now, the sheets merely rumpled instead of carelessly half-way strewn across the floor. A fire crackled in the distance, sparks shooting around the hearth. Soft moans stroked against his ear. The nightmare stag, on top of Alana again, bodies entwined, thrusting against each other like waves crashing to shore. Will's breath caught. The surge of arousal that struck him was as brutal as it was unexpected. It cut into him like a knife to the belly.

In the mirror’s reflection, dark hair and light skin blurred -- and Alana became Will. Will saw his own legs wrapped tight around the dark beast, hands gripped blindly against the tines of its antlers. He could almost feel the rough velvet rubbing raw against his palms, its thick cock stretching him open.

The mirror-image Will laughed as the creature fucked him. The peel of his lips revealed blood stained teeth, consummate pleasure.

No.

He gasped, staggering back from the mirror, dizzy and sickened. His empty stomach rebelled with two dry heaves. His lungs felt like they were going to squeeze out of his throat. When the nausea quelled, he rubbed hard at his face, feeling the dry smoothness of his cheeks, the stubble over his jaw. Only then did he look back into the mirror.

Empty again. Re-fractured, with only Hannibal’s disturbed and empty room reflected back now. The nightmare stag was gone.

His heartbeat returned to him, fast as though it had wings. His shirt was damp, clinging to his back. The sensation of warm antlers in his hands, blood on his tongue, didn't fade even as he wandered to Hannibal's walk-in closet. He couldn't breathe -- sweating like a druggie for a fix.

He grabbed unseeing at the clothes, stopping only once he pressed his face to one of Hannibal's abandoned suits. He nuzzled the shoulder of the suit, inhaling deeply. The suit coat smelled like Hannibal, of musk and smoke, of cloven spice and ash. Up close he could see the suit was check patterned, so darkly grey it was almost black.

Without thinking, Will yanked the material from its wooden hanger. The cloth was substantial yet silky smooth, boasting a high thread count. It balled into his fists easily on the way back to the car.

X

Will sat in his kitchen the next morning, coffee and bland toast untouched in front of him.

He looked blankly at his phone. He hadn't called Lucas yet. He had, however, come to a decision about the next steps he would take. What needed to happen. Lucas was shy. The hesitant eye contact, halting speech, all indicators of someone who had already been burned. Will should know. He also knew he would have to be the pursuer to get what he wanted. The hunter -- an unfamiliar role for him. The few relationships he had were mostly modeled on convenience.

With Lucas, would it be different?

Stranger than a change of role, was how much Will wanted to do it. Take Lucas apart and put him back together again. Give into an opportunity rarely afforded.

His aspirin bottle was on the counter. He rose from the table to swallow two pills dry.

When he turned around, Abigail was there in his kitchen, tracing his phone with slim fingers.

“We were supposed to go to Italy,” Abigail said sullenly. “I wanted to see the Coliseum and eat gelato by the Ponte Vecchio.”

“Did it ever occur to you I don't want to do those things? That I don't care if I ever see Hannibal again?”

Abigail tucked her hair behind the smooth stump of her missing ear. “Liar.”

Will looked away in anger, teeth clenched. When he glanced back at the table, Abigail was gone again. He forced himself to swallow down a few gulps of lukewarm coffee.

As he did, he texted Lucas.

It was a simple message: *Would you like to go sailing?*

Lucas replied within minutes: *yes*.

X

Will arrived at the Belle Haven boathouse first. He got out of the car and stretched, looking out to the docks. There was a good breeze going. Dead brown leaves blew down towards the Potomac on a gentle air, rippling the water. Will could see the Belle Haven boat manager, Nate, hauling in some kayaks from a couple of college renters.

He knew Nate quite well, from the summer. He was ex-army, but had actually grown up around boats like Will. His stocky, muscular shape was still comfortingly familiar. During the summer, Nate had bronzed a shade of olive, but now he was almost as pale as Will. If he saw Will watching him silently from the picnic tables, he made no sign of it.

Will stalled, hesitating. He sat down on a bench and tried to not to look as anxious as he felt. He rested his arm against his stomach, a wall of bone against the ache of his scar across his belly.

The parking lot was half full but Lucas's car was still not there, even five minutes after their designated meeting time.

What if Lucas didn't show up? It would be the *prudent* thing to do. Will could hardly blame him. Yet.

He could still find Lucas. The thought came swift -- and violent.

If Lucas didn't show, Will could track his steps wherever he would be. Alone on a quiet street in DC, leaving a bar or walking in an alley. It'd be almost too easy. One night very soon, he could do it. He'd be quick, press a chloroform damp cloth against his mouth and hold tight until Lucas' strong body went limp in his arms. Will would have to get him in the car fast, find a place worthy of them. And, and then --

He put his head in his hands, his pulse rocketing. Hannibal would probably keep him drugged, *keep* Will drugged, pliant and loose limbed. Psychic driving, extreme isolation and other psychological torture would be just the beginning of the new therapy regimen. Will didn't have the academic learning, but he couldn't say he was opposed to playing doctor.

He imagined Lucas like Hannibal had had him once, strapped down with pupils blown wide, mouth open and wet. A curl of heat flickered low in his belly. A flame given life.

The low hum of an engine interrupted the dark twist of Will's thoughts. He looked up, recognizing the Subaru as it pulled into the parking lot.

Lucas emerged from the car shortly after. Will almost laughed. Lucas clothes' were incredibly similar to his own, rumpled jeans, both of them donning heavy flannel button-ups.

If Lucas noticed what Will did, he didn't show it. His regard was serious, thoughtful. He walked over almost cautiously, studying his surroundings with a betraying nervousness.

"How are you?" Will asked.

"I am fine. You?"

Will eyed him quietly, taking in the subtle shadows underneath his eyes.

“You don't have to bullshit me,” Will said.

Lucas laughed dryly. “I forget that you might be one of the few who can understand.”

“Sometimes it's not about who understands,” Will said. “It's about what you need to get away from it.”

Wade into the quiet of the stream

“Please, I'd prefer to go to the boat,” Lucas said. “As you suggested. I think fresh air might help.”

“Okay, let’s get down there then.”

They started down the hill. Lucas looked around, taking in the boats, the various couples and families picnicking. Willowy trees sloped over the mostly calm water, swaying branches rippling in blue.

“Do you have any experience sailing?” Will asked, as they made their way to the dock.

“Some but not much. My friends prefered the countryside, mostly for hunting as our pastime.”

Will glanced at Lucas’ profile, so much like Hannibal's. It still made him feel breathless.

“Big game?”

“Pardon?”

“Like deer, elk? What did you hunt?”

“Ah, yes, big game,” Lucas agreed as they came to the neat row of small sailboats that were available for rent. “It's not something I do much of anymore.”

They fell silent the rest of the way. Nate had seen them coming from the picnic area and he watched their approach with a dark expression. Will couldn’t say he blamed him, though he had tried to tell him he didn’t want anything serious the few occasions they had been together -- hands moving slow, a nearly empty bottle of whiskey between them each time.

Will hadn’t even known if he would like being with a man, but there it was, and now he knew. And so did Nate.

“Hi Will,” Nate said guardedly, eyes lingering. Lucas, he plainly ignored.

“Nate,” Will returned.

“What can I do you for?”

“One of the little dinghies for rent?”

“Sure,” Nate said. Will watched as he looked over the boats, picking the one that was easiest to get in the water.

“How long you going out?”

“About two hours,” Will said, looking at the sun. The wind still had a tinge of warmth to it.

“The Nola still dead in the water?” Nate asked, almost conversationally as he started prepping the little boat. He untied the rope that anchored it with deft, sure hands. It was light and small enough that Nate didn’t need his help getting it in. Will and Lucas would have to sit close, legs touching.

“Yeah, I haven’t been focusing on that as much lately,” Will said.

Nate winced. “Busy, huh. I get it. Well, your chariot awaits,” he said, gesturing at the boat.

Will looked away, towards Lucas.

“You should get in first,” he said. He would sit at the back with the rudder behind him.

Lucas lowered himself in the boat quickly and then Will followed. Nate hung back on the edge of the dock, arms crossed against his chest.

“Have fun,” he said, his voice tight.

Will ignored him. He moved the sail and then he and Lucas were off.

Neither of them spoke until they were some distance away. The sail took them across the bay easily, and Will let old instincts take over. He told Lucas when to duck so he could change the direction of the sail when he needed.

“That man at the docks didn’t care for me, did he?” Lucas said, after a few minutes. “Friend of yours?”

“Something like that,” Will snorted, wind ruffling his hair. He looked out into the distance, the placid Potomac. His reflection made a hazy patina on its surface. “He may have been a little jealous. Sorry you had to see it.”

Nate’s jealousy had invited Bedelia into Will’s mind. He could almost hear the sound of her stilettos clicking on cement again, hear her slurred speech between his prison bars. Hannibal was somewhere in Europe with her now. And he was probably very happy with her, someone who could perform and *entertain* for an audience, silver tongued and gracefully charming. Someone Will could never be.

Nate had been… a tool. One Will yielded the same way he used a screwdriver on a motor.

“I think your friend was more than a little jealous,” Lucas said, but his tone was curious, not as sarcastic as Will’s would’ve been.

“We had an arrangement, nothing serious,” Will said. But it was said in such a way he didn't know if he was explaining to himself or Lucas.

“I assume he knew that,” Lucas said, cocking an eyebrow at him.

“He knew well enough.”

Lucas frowned at that, shifting his long legs uneasily.

“What about me? Are there things I should know?”

“I like you,” Will said honestly. He bit his lip, looking at Lucas again. “I want to get to know you. See more of you.”

“I’m only here for another week.”

“I have a passport.”

Lucas laughed, abruptly and incredulously at Will's daring. But there was somehow warmth to it. Will felt it like a whisper below his sweater, a soft touch to his skin. Their knees brushed on the little boat, and neither moved away from it.

“You would visit me,” Lucas said. “In Denmark? Because you like me?”

“Yes.”

“What if I disappointed you?” Lucas said. “That’s what tends to happen.”

“I don’t disappoint easily. Tends to go the other way around. But I’ll bite. Are you referring to something in particular?”

“Before my life changed, I had a girlfriend. She wanted me, I thought, and then suddenly she didn’t.”

Will let the words unlock images in his mind, different from a crime scene but no less florid. A woman took shape, pretty and curvy, she’d want to take care of Lucas, initially. Lucas was as attractive as Hannibal even if he didn't know it. And she would've had to have been persistent. They would have met at the school Lucas worked at, he was too shy to go out, Will knew. Maybe they first bumped into each other in the staff lounge before school started. She would’ve been attracted to Lucas’ gentle quiet, his perceived difference from other men.

Then Lucas’ life had shattered like glass under a young girl’s thoughtless accusation. Will supposed Lucas’ new girlfriend would be confused at first, wondering what was a lie about Lucas, then what wasn’t. Apathy would follow, then unexpected coldness as Lucas was determined to be a flight risk. Unstable.

Perhaps it was because of the accusation but maybe it was something else, she would think. The otherness that had first appealed to her was now more repelling than anything. Lucas didn't have a lack of feeling exactly, but a lack of skill in expression. Tended to make others uncomfortable, had problems connecting.

“I’d say we’re more alike than we think.”

Lucas drew a shaky breath, accepting the truth in Will’s answer.

Will asked him to duck to he could change direction of the sail. His fingers slipped over starchy canvas cloth, then, almost unconsciously the silky smooth strands of Lucas’ hair sweeping across his brow. It was only a second but impossible for either of them to ignore.

Lucas looked up, straightening his back. The sail had cleared. The little boat glided forward, whisper light on the wind.

“I’m paranoid,” Lucas said. “Even here.”

“Warning me away from damaged goods now?” Will asked, only-partly teasing. “I'm guessing you haven't Googled me.”

Lucas made a face. “I couldn't. It would be a violation. Your experiences should be given, not taken.”

When Will looked away, staring at a blurry point beyond Lucas’ shoulder, he frowned.

“Have I said something wrong?”

“No, no,” Will muttered. “It’s not you. I’ve never been good at talking about my feelings. It doesn’t bother me if you look me up. Just -- avoid TattleCrime if you can? The editor is loose on facts, less so on the outright slander.”

Lucas hesitated. “I think I’ve met her, actually.”

“Freddie? Freddie Lounds? You met her?”

“Not too tall? Curly red hair and boots up to here?” Lucas made a vague gesture towards his mid-thigh.

“Fuck.”

“I remembered what you said, about people confusing me for Hannibal. I was wearing a cap and my glasses when I saw her. She was following me with a camera.”

“Did she take photos of you?”

“She tried, but I don’t think she got anything good. She also tried to speak to me but I pretended I didn’t understand her and went into my hotel.”

Will swore. “I bet she followed you. Did the security stop her from coming in?”

“Yes, they seemed to recognize her,” Lucas said. His lips quirked slightly at the memory. “She was escorted out.”

“Good,” Will said, with undisguised relish. Then, “I’m sorry you had to deal with that. She has been stalking me for a long time. She is completely inappropriate and unethical.”

She should be dead.

“Why does she follow you?”

“Her speciality is writing about the worst in people. She thought I got too close to my work,” Will said. “Solving murders was never *fun*, but I was… useful at it.”

“Did you get too close?”

Will startled. “Yes.”

“It doesn’t bother me, that you’re passionate about your work.”

“It’s not my job anymore.”

“You came to see me though, in Quantico.”

“That was personal.”

Lucas considered this. “I’m glad. Strange as that is. That you cared enough to see me or someone you thought was me, at least.”

“Don't say that.”

“It's how I feel. Before I came here I felt everyone was looking at me but only because they despised me. Now I'm not sure if they're looking for me or Hannibal Lecter. You’re different, Will.”

“I know.”

Lucas’ expression was pained. “I didn’t mean it like that. I truly feel that I’m lucky to have met you.”

Will snorted. “You might be the first. I’m sure you wished your trip had gone differently.”

“No, not really.”

“What did you want when you came? I doubt you were imagining this,” he said, gesturing out to the Potomac.

Lucas smiled. “It’s not so bad really. Before I came, I was almost shot.”

“What? Someone --?”

“They warned me,” Lucas corrected. “I was alone in the woods on a deer hunt. It was supposed to be a trip with my friends, my loved ones. I walked in the woods with my rifle. It was so still and quiet. I almost felt peace. There was a stag in the clearing. We saw each other

and then a light blinded me -- and a shot was fired. Directly over my head. It hit the tree, and not me. The difference was mere inches."

"Did you see who shot at you?"

"No. But the message was received regardless. I knew I would never be accepted, not fully. I could see the rest of the days and then the years of my life stretching out like that, always looking over my shoulder. Waiting for another pulled trigger."

Will looked at Lucas, the gold, not red, flecks of color in his irises, the unshaven stubble on his cheeks that matched Will's own. The promising shape of his mouth.

"We're left to manufacture our own peace then," Will said.

X

They docked the boat at the marina as the sun dipped low behind the horizon. Nate was nowhere to be seen, but Will knew how to secure the boat. The temperature was dropping rapidly, so they left quickly, for Will's house in Wolf Trap. Lucas followed in his Subaru.

The last gold sliver of sun was gone by the time they parked in Will's driveway. The sky made a strange canvas, broad strokes of violet and ruby lining the view for miles. Will could already sense the excitement of the dogs in the house, clustering around the front door and windows.

When he opened the door, they rushed out in a happy flurry, tails flying, wet noses trailing on both his and Lucas' pants. Lucas laughed.

"You weren't lying about collecting dogs!" he said. Will glanced over at him, unable to stop his smile. The dogs clustered around Lucas and Lucas was happy about it, trying to pet each wiggling head. His pleasure made him look years younger.

It warmed something in Will.

"Let's take them out for a bit," he said, knowing Lucas wouldn't mind.

They walked out to the field with his dogs as they ran. They made light conversation. Lucas asked careful questions about Will's property and the land surrounding it, specifically how it was used. Will confessed he had never had much of a green thumb. The questions veered then towards his neighbors. Wasn't much to say there. There was only one Will really knew, an elderly woman who worked for the State Department, she had a brown lab named Ellie. Will would occasionally walk Ellie when his neighbor's work ran late, and she would do the same for him.

"In the past, it was mostly me who asked for favors. But I bet Elizabeth will be asking for more dog walks these days than me."

"And the other neighbors? They leave you alone?"

Will shrugged. “I’m rarely disturbed,” he said. “Sometimes even cell reception is bad out here. Should have realized that would just lead to more people visiting me at odd hours.”

“Well, your home, it’s beautiful,” Lucas said, glancing back over his shoulder at Will’s house.

His old rambler still looked like a boat drifting at sea, especially under the halo of night. Even after Randall Tier, Mason Verger, and everything else that had emerged from the darkness. All the storms Hannibal had brought to his doorstep had passed, but they were never quite gone. Merely … dissipated.

When he and Lucas made it back inside, Will poured them both generous glasses of whiskey.

“Would you like a fire?” Will asked. “It gets chilly here.”

“No,” Lucas said. “I’m fine. It’s not as cold as I’m used to. Besides, I like it,” He cleared his throat, sending his adam’s apple quivering. “Your house is very nice. Even inside.”

“Feel free to explore then,” Will said. “Haven’t had guests in a while.”

Lucas nodded, looking around the house with interest. He moved around slowly, carefully avoiding Stella and Buster who followed him with excitement.

Will watched Lucas idle at his book shelves, his work desk. He had already put away his fishing lures but he hadn’t had the heart to put away his lone photo of Abigail. It was his sole, and only, physical reminder of the girl he had tried to help.

The *memento* had been given to him by Freddie during a rare civil visitation at the hospital.

Abigail's smile stood out like a rose among the flotsam of Will's life. It hadn’t felt right to tuck her away into a drawer.

Lucas glanced down at the desk, studying the photo with a furrowed brow.

Will wondered if the angles of Abigail’s sad smile were as apparent to Lucas as they were to him.

“Your sister?” Lucas asked.

“No, she was- I was her guardian. I was supposed to help her.”

“You met her through your work.”

“Yes. After I got - involved in a case that involved her family. She was orphaned.”

Lucas touched the photo of Abigail gently. “So did you?”

“Did I what?”

“Help her.”

He flinched, not quite able to stop the memory of Abigail choking on a scream, blood arcing hot across his face in Hannibal's kitchen.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "No. I didn't help. Turns out I'm not very good at that. Helping people isn't what comes naturally. I can just read them."

Lucas' face softened. "Tell me about her then, even if you didn't help her the way you imagined."

"Abigail," Will said, the word a dry croak. He coughed, trying to clear his throat. "Her name."

He almost expected Abigail to appear, leaning against the door, arms crossing over her chest.

"She was -- a nice girl," Will said. He made a face at his own words. "Everything I say sounds like a funeral. Like I'm making her die all over again. A psychiatrist would say I'm in denial, I suppose."

"I'm not your psychiatrist. I couldn't tell you what's right or wrong to feel."

"I know."

Lucas looked at Will for a long moment. Then he held out his hand. "Come here."

Will went to Lucas' side by his desk. He followed Lucas' gaze out the window, at the leafless trees swaying in the blustery winter winds, the empty field filling with shadows.

"In Denmark, we believe in opening a window for 'the soul' of the loved one to pass through once they have died," Lucas said.

Will's window latch was cobwebbed. It had been months since he opened it. But he leaned forward, unlatching the window without thinking. Almost instantly a cool breeze pushed in but Will knew Abigail's ghost was here to stay.

Abigail and closure were foreign concepts, separate as water and oil. But he felt Lucas' warmth radiating through his clothes, the solid bulk of his body like a wall behind him. When he lowered the window back again, Will turned back to look at him. They regarded each other with something unnameable.

He felt hot, skin pressed too tight. He felt as vulnerable as the moment Hannibal touched his face before sliding a knife into his gut. He fidgeted with his glass, taking a sip of whiskey. It went down good. The oaky flavor filled his throat, velvety and phenolic.

Lucas did the same, lips kissing light against the edge of his glass.

"This is good," he said.

Will took another long sip of the fiery liquid. The first had been for flavor, the second to do what he had planned since he had first seen Lucas, the broken man that wore Hannibal's face.

Lucas watched him with dark eyes.

“Is it?” Will asked. He licked his lips. “Good?”

He set his glass down then moved close, pressing Lucas backwards from the window. He wondered if Lucas would move away but he only stilled. His hands skimmed Will's sides, light as air.

Will hovered there, their lips only a breath away. Lucas was looking at him, waiting it seemed. Will realized that Lucas wanted to be pressured, wanted to be forced.

Will could relate.

He angled his head and kissed Lucas, soft at first then harder. A small sound escaped Lucas’ throat. Will nipped at his lip, pushing him again towards his bed till they were lined hip to hip. He wasn’t going to be gentle, he wasn’t going to wait any longer. He wanted to taste, he had waited long enough. He pressed his lips tightly against his mouth, kissing deeply. Tongues stroked, mapping the inside of each other’s mouths. Lucas was sea salt, the faintest trace of mint below the sharp bite of alcohol.

His hands skated down Lucas’ abdomen to undo his pants. He fumbled with the buttons until Lucas stopped him, holding onto his hands. Will realized they were trembling.

“We don't have to -- rush this. I believe that’s the expression, isn’t it?”

“You leave in a week,” Will protested.

Lucas smiled.

“A whole week,” he said.

Will groaned, but kissed Lucas again. He did with his tongue what he wanted to do to Lucas’ body, sucking on his lower lip hard and biting. They parted, both gasping.

“I'm going to make it hard for you.”

“I hoped you would say that,” Lucas said. He leaned forward from the bed, pulling Will to him with fingers curled into his belt loops. The stiff line of his cock pressed into Will’s, large even through pants.

Will swore. Lucas laughed, warm and pleased against Will’s jaw, until they kissed again. This time it was even longer. They stopped only to breathe, little shudders for air and Will struggling to speak.

“We’re gonna need more whiskey,” he said but Lucas was kissing his throat, then straining after his mouth, as out of breath as Will.

“Will,” he murmured, wide eyed as Will arched his back, grabbing roughly at Lucas’ ass.

Lucas’ hunger was real, feverish and needy on Will’s mouth and skin.

He had never looked more like Hannibal.

Baited.

And hooked.

How Long Till You Let Go

Chapter Notes

Thank you, thank you lovely, brilliant WeConqueratDawn for editing genius. :D

Thank you wonderful commenters.

PLEASE BE WARNED I have not tagged everything in this because I don't want to spoil what I hope are a few twists and turns. If there is anything that you're particularly worried about reading you are welcome to leave a comment at the end to ask if it's in this or send me a private message if you like.

The next week passed idly, happily even. Will and Lucas had several dates. They met for an overpriced but tasty Greek dinner in Old Town Alexandria. Over lamb souvlaki and dolmades, Will shared more about his former job. He talked about the stranger cases like those of Tobias Budge and Eldon Stammets, but more about teaching in Quantico, because Lucas was interested in what that was like.

His classes on blood splatter analysis and toolmark identification weren't exactly appropriate dinner conversation but if Lucas was bothered by the subject matter he didn't say. A fascination with the macabre infected more people than not.

Lucas talked about his life before losing his job. He had always liked kids, it turned out. Will wondered if he would've liked Abigail. He could imagine them hunting together.

Gunshot, then, a fallen doe in the clearing, eager Abigail, and Lucas as her guide. The image was fleeting, too soon replaced with Hannibal shoveling dirt over Nicholas Boyle's corpse, Abigail curious and watchful.

The next day, Lucas and Will met at the National Arboretum in northeast D.C. Will had always liked it, simply because it was quiet -- a place tourists tended to avoid. Not enough monuments to war or peace. Only nature.

The trees loomed over them like dark giants, anorexic and skeletal from winter's bite. Will brought the dogs, and Lucas walked half of them without asking, four leashes wrapped around one hand.

Their time together ended with two glasses of whiskey, this time at Lucas' nice hotel, a two-room suite. The dogs were left in the living room when Will took Lucas to bed. The lights of nearby buildings haloed through the window, printed on their skin when they kissed and touched.

Abigail became a memory, incorporeal in real time, as he and Lucas traveled to each other's places, growing closer. One morning, he stared out his window for a long moment, wondering if he really had let her go when he opened the window with Lucas that night.

It was a sign he had to move on.

Will's moment came the night before Lucas left. He texted Lucas that he should come to Wolf Trap for the evening. In the earlier hours of the morning, he had caught a rather large Asian catfish, enough meat for at least four fillets. There was also a pot of gumbo simmering on the stove, teeming with chili powder, sage and paprika.

Lucas arrived on time. He always took a few moments to play with the dogs.

They kissed shyly, both too aware that their time together was running out.
"Hello," he said. "It smells nice in here."

The rasp of roughness from Lucas' jaw sent an ache spiraling down Will's chest to his groin. He shivered, but Lucas was still there, breathing him in.

"You smell good," Lucas said.

"Not like fish guts I hope? I did shower," he joked.

Lucas nosed along his neck. "Spicy," he murmured.

"That would be the food. Hope you're hungry," Will said.

Lucas pulled away, smiling. He bent down again to pet one of the dogs begging for his attention. "I feel like you've been fattening me up."

Will tensed, but Lucas' expression was frustratingly innocent, utterly unknowing. He still hadn't read anything about Will's past - or Hannibal's - no matter how many times Will hinted he should.

"From the hush puppies to the beignets, I don't know if I'll fit my clothes any longer," he continued lightly, still petting Trixie. She licked her muzzle, staring at Lucas with complete adoration.

Will felt the same.

"You look good," Will said fondly. And that was the problem. Lucas belonged, amid Will's things and home, with his dogs.

"Do I look good enough for you to come visit me in Denmark?"

"Hmm, my schedule is kind of busy here," Will said. "But maybe."

"You can sail there," Lucas said. "Get a boat just like the one you have outside. Better even. We have many lakes to enjoy the quiet life. Get away from the TattleCrimes and ugliness of the world."

“Be a recluse?”

“Two are not recluses, Will. Two have each other.”

“I'll remember that,” Will said. He paused. “Would I meet your son?”

“Of course. When he's home from school.”

Will nodded, swallowing as Lucas finally stood up, making a gesture to remove his coat. A strange anger simmered, that Lucas would let him into his life as if it was nothing, and that Will could simultaneously cut his ties and leave so easily.

It could never be that easy. He had the scar to prove it.

He knew he couldn't wait any longer.

As Lucas turned, Will hooked his foot out, just barely. It was enough to make Lucas stumble, mid step. The dogs panicked and when Lucas went down, his leg whole leg twisted to the side in an effort to avoid them.

He fell hard. One of the dogs giving a frightful yelp as he barely missed landing on them. Lucas cried out from the floor, gripping his ankle. His face went bone white.

“Lucas?” Will said, bending down by his side. The dogs clustered around them until Will shooed them. “Are you OK?”

“I tripped, on one of the dogs, I think,” he groaned. “My leg--”

“Can you move? Take my arm.”

Lucas tried to stand for only a second before he cried out again, mouth twisting.

“Give it a minute,” Will said, watching his face. Little beads of sweat were beginning to stand out on his lip, the grip of his hand was clammy against Will’s skin. Lucas cupped his ankle again.

“I think it’s broken,” he said, his eyes wide. “My ankle.”

“Don't try to move it. We're going to get you to the emergency room.”

Will went to his dresser drawer, gathering supplies for a makeshift splint. Within seconds, he had rolls of tee-shirts and a belt. That would do. He turned the stove off before he went back to Lucas’ side. The food would spoil. It was a necessary sacrifice.

Beside Lucas again, he bundled the cloth tight around Lucas’ ankle, using the belt to secure the splint.

Lucas gasped at that, fingers clenched into Will’s arm.

“You’re going to be fine,” Will said. “Can you put on your weight on me so I can help lift you up?”

Lucas bit his lip. “I’ll try.”

They did, Lucas leaning heavily onto him, favoring the foot that he hadn’t twisted.

The reality of what Will had done finally hit him as they limped out the front door. His stomach leapt to his throat. His pulse was too loud, reverberating in a heady thrum through his ears.

“I was very clumsy,” Lucas murmured, catching sight of Will’s face. “It wasn’t Trixie’s fault.”

“Let’s not talk about that now,” Will said. His voice came out harder than he intended. Carefully, he eased Lucas out to the porch. The dogs waited behind them. They watched them go quietly, ears and tails drooping.

Trixie stood away from the pack, near where Lucas fell. Her eyes were on Will's, and she seemed to look at Will differently than she ever had before -- almost accusingly.

Will felt it the entire drive to Fairfax, Lucas’ pained breath rattling his nerves like bullets in glass.

X

Lucas ended up staying the night at the hospital.

The on-call doctor assessed Lucas’ bruised, twisted ankle with a few questions and considerably more pokes. By the time he had finished, Lucas had gotten even paler. Will could already see the purplish tinge of a bruise around the thickened slope of his ankle bone. His ankle was well onto its way of being twice its normal size.

“Displaced fracture,” the doctor had said crisply.

The diagnosis took less than a minute, but the X-rays considerably longer. Lucas was still sickly pale, in pain every time he was moved.

“Our orthopedic specialist in foot and ankle fractures is in tomorrow,” the doctor said, after he had done a quick review of the X-rays with them. “At this hour, I suggest you sit tight for the night here so you can see her first thing.”

Lucas looked at Will, an unspoken question in his eyes.

“He has a flight tomorrow morning,” Will said. “Is there any way he can make the plane?”

Lucas muttered something Will didn’t understand.

“Lucas?”

“I meant to tell you this earlier, but I delayed my trip. Sorry.”

Will faltered. “You delayed -- what?”

“Delayed--”

“No, I understand the word. I just… Why?”

Lucas said nothing but his eyes pleaded with Will for understanding -- for compassion. The knot of disgust in Will’s stomach grew impossibly large.

“Problem solved it seems,” the doctor said, one eyebrow raised as he glanced between them.

“Yes,” Will said dully, avoiding Lucas’ eyes.

“Good. For the rest of your stay here, I recommend painkillers, lots of rest and staying put, at least until you see Dr. Perez tomorrow and confirm whether or not you'll need surgery,” the doctor said. “I'll get a nurse to come in with some meds and a pillow to prop your leg up. You’re going to be fine, Mr. Thomson.”

“Thank you,” Lucas said weakly.

X

The night passed slowly. Lucas was sweaty and uncomfortable. It wasn't until the nurse gave him another dose of codeine that he quieted.

Will watched over Lucas’ sleep. It was fitful -- thin as the cheap hospital sheets. Though he couldn't move his leg from its binding he tossed and turned his head, eyes rolling back unseeing beneath his eyelids.

Will woke him when it got too bad, giving Lucas steady sips of water from a plastic cup. It dripped down the supple line of his throat to his hospital gown, despite Will’s best efforts.

Lucas looked strangely small in the bed. Vulnerable. Will kissed the top of his head as he slept. Lucas’ fingers twitched in his and Will couldn’t tell if he was frowning or smiling. He had stood still by Lucas for what felt like hours, legs aching from standing.

The anchor of Lucas’ grip was the only thing keeping Will from floating away to the Cappella Palatina, where the craven skull waited. Patient as the grave.

Eventually he drifted to the bathroom. The light flickered in the small room at the end of the hall. He hung over the sink, peeling up his shirt sleeves to wash his hands, then his arms all the way up to the elbows. In the dim mirror, he saw a ghost wearing his skin -- a dark apparition that had cursed Lucas, hurting him for the worst of reasons.

For love. And, for hate.

What have I done?

A splash of cold water offered little relief.

He stopped at the vending machine next. He knew exactly where it was, though he hadn't been sent to Inova when Hannibal gutted him. The layout of this hospital reminded him of both John Hopkins and Georgetown. They were all the same. Including the snack food options.

Seemingly endless bags of chips and packaged, powdered rows of donuts did for his lack of an appetite. He had cooked a good meal at home, freshly-caught fish, homemade gumbo filled to the brim with cayenne and ground peppercorns. He should've thought that through a little more, timing wise. Hannibal would've. He remembered the chicken noodle soup Hannibal had brought him after he was diagnosed with encephalitis. The silkie broth had seemed to warm him to his bones.

He wished he had something as nourishing to give Lucas.

X

Dr. Perez came to Lucas' room and introduced herself a minute shy of 8 a.m. Her perky pony tail had no traces of gray. She was bright eyed and young, younger than Will. Still, Will could see very quickly that she was efficient and detail-oriented, her chart on Lucas already had several handwritten notes. Something in her put-together demeanor reminded him of Alana, from years ago, before his brain was on fire, before either of them had loved a killer.

Dr. Perez spent almost a full thirty minutes with Lucas, explaining his break and answering their questions.

Once she was told how Lucas had fallen-- by tripping on one of the dogs, she suggested Lucas get a cast rather than a boot.

"I'd prefer you keep your ankle as stable as possible so plaster is best bet. It'll take at least eight weeks to heal," she said. "To make sure you don't put any weight on it, you'll have to use crutches too. Plus side, no surgery. If the bone had shifted any more that it did you would need it. Count yourself lucky."

"Thank you," Lucas said. "I do." He looked from the doctor to Will. His gratitude was embarrassing.

"Don't thank me yet Mr. Thomson," Dr. Perez said. "There's a possibility it could take longer than eight weeks. You probably involved some ligaments and tendons in your fall. We won't know for a few weeks. Unless you want an MRI. That's up to you."

"What do you think? I've never had an MRI before?"

Will had, but he waited for the doctor to answer instead.

"I think it's something to consider after we get your cast off. We'll see how you're doing then, after immobilization."

"I will take great precaution to keep my weight off of it," Lucas said.

“Good,” Dr. Perez said. She consulted her papers. “Now, I see your residence is in Denmark. If you plan to return home before our check in appointment simply call the hospital before you do with the fax number for your doctor and I'll pass on your medical records. They might not be too useful in another country.”

“I will delay traveling as long as I can,” Lucas said.

Dr. Perez paused, this time looking at Will. Will wasn't sure what sort of sad, rumpled figure he made at the moment but the glance she gave him was entirely too much like Alana with her pity.

“Please make sure he does,” she said.

Will and Lucas were left alone, but only for a few minutes until a nurse came to wrap Lucas’ cast.

Will sat in a chair in the corner of the room, watching. Lucas’ entire leg seemed tender, and even more black and purple today. The sight of his bare ankle, as swollen as his calf muscle, flipped Will’s stomach.

The technician was gentle with Lucas at least. Very carefully, he wrapped layers of soft cotton around his heel and ankle. Then a filmy putty like material was soaked in water. The wet plaster was wrapped around Lucas’ leg, reaching mid-calf.

“It’s still drying so be careful,” the nurse said, “In about five minutes it will be a hard, protective covering. Try not to get it wet at home.”

Will gathered their things as Lucas signed his discharge paperwork.

Lucas was given even more painkillers before they left, the hospital staff told him it was to make his drive home more comfortable. The staff arranged for a wheelchair and a pair of crutches. The wheelchair would be relied on more the first few days they said, to get Lucas to the car and around while inflammation was at its worst, so Lucas could stay off his foot as long as possible. They were relieved when Will told them Lucas could avoid the stairs at his home. Everything he would need would be on the first floor.

As they were leaving Lucas’ pain, at least, had seemed to level off, no doubt due to the staff’s pharmacological intervention.

He made jokes with the two female nurses in the hall. They flirted back with him, asking him where he was from, gazing at Will with curious eyes.

“At least you’ll have someone nice to take care of you,” one of the nurses said, glancing between them.

Lucas smiled, glancing up at Will from under the tawny gold sweep of his eyelashes. The nurse hadn’t meant anything by it, but Will felt a hot stab of resentment at her, and at Lucas’ naivety. Ignorant as lambs. Stupid and blind as Will had been about Hannibal. He was tired of being crowded and surrounded by people, worn out from their assumptions.

His mood took a far worse turn as they left the hospital.

Freddie was waiting for them in the pick up area, a sardonic smile curled on her lips, high heeled boots tapping lightly on the pavement.

“Hi,” she exclaimed with fake surprise. She focused on Lucas immediately, ignoring Will for easier prey. “You’re Lucas Thomson right? From Denmark?

Lucas blinked slowly, still too loopy from pain meds to recognize Freddie, even though they had met before.

“Do I know you?”

“No, you don't,” Will said sharply. “Get lost,” he said to Freddie.

Freddie rolled her eyes. “Not my fault you’re in the hospital again. No need to be so rude.”

Will was already flustered, he didn't want to leave Lucas alone but he didn't want to wheel him all the way to the car either.

Freddie cocked her head to the side, smiling slyly.

“It's OK,” Freddie said. “I'll keep an eye on your patient while you bring your car around. Free of charge.”

Will bit back his retort.

“Don't talk to her if you don't want,” he told Lucas. He stalked off to his car, keys gripped painfully tight in his fist.

He couldn’t get to the parking lot fast enough. Tires squealed as he went back to the pickup loop in front of the hospital. Freddie had moved so she was right in front of Lucas now, her back to Will.

Lucas was only looking straight ahead, waiting for Will. Will pulled up and put the car in park. He could hear Freddie talking but Lucas was silent. He got out from the driver side fast, smiling forcibly at Lucas as he wheeled him to the passenger side.

Freddie mock pouted. “You really know how to ruin an interview.”

“What interview?” Will said as he helped Lucas into the seat. “I think you mean harassment.”

Freddie laughed loudly, her eyes sparking. He bristled, glaring at her neck.

“Harassment?” she repeated. “Oh, I guess you would know a lot about that, and stalking and threatening... The list kind of goes on and on, doesn't it.”

“You already know what kind of trash you're going to write for your blog so just go do it,” Will said. “I’m not giving you anything.”

“What about you, sweetie?” Freddie asked, peering over Will’s shoulder at Lucas. “My readers would love to have your story. I can expose the FBI for how they’ve been treating you, you’ll be able to stay somewhere nicer than Will’s dump in Wolf Trap.”

“No, thank you,” Lucas said. He rested his head back against his seat, clearly tired.

Will leaned forward, securing his seat belt tight across his lap. “Give me one minute,” he said to Lucas, just as he shut the door.

Just like that, Freddie’s fake smile faded.

“You do know TattleCrime is more than a blog,” she said. “Thousands of readers subscribe to my updates. You might be interested in knowing that my global readership is stronger than ever. Can you imagine? People reading my stories from cities like Paris and Venice.”

“I can't imagine nor do I care,” Will said, folding up Lucas’ wheelchair and sliding it into the trunk.

“Hmm, guess when Hannibal left us your imagination took a serious hit along with your gut,” Freddie said. “Let me help you out. I can see the headline now... *Rumored Child Molester is Hannibal Lecter Lookalike*.”

So Freddie had managed to dig up Lucas’ story.

“Don't you think he's had enough?”

Freddie narrowed her eyes. “Don't you?”

He ignored that in favor of going around the other side of his car to get in.

“Fuck off,” he said, just as he slammed the door.

Lucas sat still in the car next to him. For a moment Will couldn’t speak. His knuckles gripped pink and white against his steering wheel.

“You OK?” he asked Lucas.

“Yes OK, just tired,” he replied, his voice was thick and sluggish. “That woman, Freddie? She was the one who wrote those things about you, wasn’t she? I couldn’t remember her until now. But her hair, it’s like fire, yeah? Can't believe I forgot.”

“You’re doped to the gills.”

“I am--” Lucas started, then laughed. “Oh, I get it! That’s funny. American expressions, okay, wow. Like hush puppies. I love hush puppies. I love dogs.”

“Me too,” Will said as he pulled out from the hospital. He kept an eye on Freddie as he drove further away.

He funneled his frustration into his driving, intentionally taking turns too fast, stopping too slow. It was only when Lucas made a noise of pain that Will snapped out of it. He slowed his speed with a deep breath, let his feet lighten on the pedals.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured then, looking over at Lucas slumped in his seat.

“It’s okay,” Lucas said. “There’s not much you can do.”

But there was. He was on the beltway, keeping an eye out for Freddie’s car following. It had been at least ten minutes since they had left and she was nowhere to be seen.

Traffic on the highway was still crawling, and after a few minutes of waiting Will decided to take a shortcut through Oakton. It would make for a smoother ride for Lucas -- less stop and go, less of his cast bouncing around the floor of his car.

Will drove a little under the speed limit now, and Lucas kept his heavily-lidded eyes out the window. Will had no idea if he was looking out or not, or falling asleep. The edges of Tamarack Park were viewable from the car, from Lucas’ window. Will looked out over his head to see the rows of picnic benches and sets of unused playground equipment. The park was empty save for a girl on the swing. Will blinked.

Long strands of brown hair fell across her face. She was hunched in on herself, looking down at the ground.

Will slammed on the breaks. Lucas gasped, his foot thumping hard against the car’s interior.

“Sorry,” Will muttered, even as he shifted to the shoulder of the road. He parked the car. “I think I see someone I know.”

He got out of the car before Lucas could respond. From there, it was just a few feet to the park, to the swing set with its lone occupant.

It didn’t take long to see that the girl wasn’t Abigail. Up close, she was clearly younger, by at least three years. Her body was too small, even bundled up in a thick purple parka. Still, when she glanced up at him his heart sank.

She was barely a teenager, probably only thirteen. Her cheeks were wind chapped but her eyes were brown, her nose small and button like. She looked at Will with practiced attitude, producing a cell phone from the pocket of her jacket as if it was a threat.

He backed up, holding his hands up. “Sorry. I- didn’t mean to scare you. I thought you were someone else. Someone I knew.”

“Yeah well, I’m waiting for my dad so,” the girl snapped. “You really shouldn't be running up on people like that.”

“Sorry again,” Will swallowed. “I got it.”

He walked away from her, an icy chill settling over his shoulders. It clung like a second shadow. His limbs felt numb, like someone else’s. When was the last time he saw Abigail?

He couldn't remember.

Inside the car, Lucas was already trying to lift himself out of his seat, crutches wobbling precariously beneath his arms.

"No," Will snapped. "You were supposed to wait."

One hand was all that was needed to push Lucas back down and into the car. Lucas protested but it was too late, Will had already slammed the door shut.

Will stomped over to the driver side, slamming the car door behind him.

Inside the car, it was quiet. The keys hung motionless from the ignition. Lucas was breathing loudly -- Will realized it was because he was hurting bad. Didn't matter.

When he trusted himself to speak, he glared over at Lucas.

"Are you stupid?" Will demanded. "Are you trying to hurt yourself? Break another ankle?"

Lucas flinched. "Maybe you shouldn't run away," he said. "Why do you always run?"

Anger pulsated in his chest. Before Will could respond, a large blue pick-up truck pulled in behind Will's car, its engine still rumbling. The teen he had mistaken for Abigail earlier emerged from the park. The driver waited for the girl to join him in the cab before he drive off. Will watched as the truck grew tiny, a small, inconsequential speck heading towards the highway.

Will couldn't help it. A strange, little chuckle escaped his gritted teeth.

Lucas looked at him, horribly confused. "Will, are you- -"

Will didn't wait. He leaned forward, over the center console until his mouth brushed against Lucas'. Surprise crossed Lucas' face but he didn't stop Will's tongue from pushing in, didn't stop the hot little licks up the seam of his mouth. It was fast and needy. No time to think. That was what Will needed.

When they broke apart, Will took Lucas's crutches from him, tossing them to the back seat, then crawled over the center median to straddle Lucas. Lucas groaned once, and loudly -- Will's weight might be crushing him -- but he only stared at Will with ink-black pupils, mouth parting for more kisses, like a hungry baby bird.

"Lift," Will said.

Obediently, Lucas' hips rose an inch from the seat, enough for Will to pull down the elastic hospital pants he wore to his knees. Lucas' cock, thickening under Will's eyes, fit so well in his hands. Will stroked him, eliciting a low moan.

"What is -- are you doing?" Lucas asked.

“I think that should be pretty obvious,” Will said. He kissed Lucas, fucking his mouth open with his tongue.

He unbuttoned and tugged off his own pants quickly. Daylight filtered through his dirty window, shining bright on Lucas’ face, his. Anyone who drove into the empty parking lot and parked near them would probably be able to tell what they were doing but Will didn’t care who saw them.

Lucas followed his gaze out the window, biting his swollen lips. “Will...we can’t. Not here.”

“Don’t worry,” Will murmured, voice pitched low and soothing. He wrapped his hand around Lucas’ cock, thumb caressing the ridge where the head and shaft met. “There’s drug deals going down in this park every day, police avoid this park like the plague.”

He took off Lucas’s shirt next, skimming his hands up his chest, over greying, wiry hair to flat, hard nipples. Lucas gasped, arching his back as Will took one into his mouth, sucking unforgiving and hard. One hand stayed on Lucas’ cock, stroking with his palm.

“You’re really afraid of people seeing us? At least it would be true. At least it would be *real*.” The words were whispered against his neck, hot against his racing pulse.

“No -- it’s -- oh -- not like that,” Lucas said.

“Then what is it? You don’t want this?”

Will fisted Lucas’ cock tightly, pre-seminal fluid seeping between the clutch of his fingers. Lucas twitched beneath him, his body had gone limp and sweaty.

“Will, please.”

Will reached behind his back for the glove compartment. There was still a half-full bottle of lube and box of condoms from his time with Nate. He quickly slicked his fingers with viscous liquid, there was no finesse to what he did, the awkward reach around to his hole. His legs trembled in vibrato around Lucas’s hips while he opened his body.

Lucas stared at Will from the dark slips of his eyes. He made a pained sound when Will finally got two fingers inside, teeth caught between his lips.

Will looked at him, curious. He pulled slick fingers from his body, wiping them on his discarded pants.

“Am I hurting you?” he asked. He used his teeth to rip open the foiled package of a condom.

“Y-yes,” Lucas groaned, head falling back to hit the car seat as Will rolled the length of latex down his cock, sheathing him.

“Is that why you want to stop?”

“No- I, it’s hard to think when you’re--” Lucas said, looking down where Will’s hand was still wrapped around his cock. “You’re unhappy. You deserve a good -- our first time should

be good. It should make you happy."

"This will make me very happy," Will said.

Lucas' breath was rapid and short when Will reared up, pressing very hard, very deliberately. Lucas' cock nudged shallowly into him, little teases that made him ache.

"Please," Lucas whispered. His chin was rough as sandpaper on Will's mouth.

"Stop me," Will said, just as he pushed himself down harder. His hole gave to the sweet, slick slide of Lucas' cock.

His hips bucked, even as Lucas winced. Will took as much as could, breath held. A droplet of sweat wound down the curve of his spine. It was tight, the friction burned and stung. He felt full enough to break.

But the angle had Lucas' cock resting right where he needed it. He tried moving on him, tiny little thrusts. The pressure made Will warm, his pelvis already quivering. Lucas cried out from it, fingers gripping Will's thighs.

He gave them no time to adjust, focusing as much as he could on the electric brush against his prostate. Clear fluid leaked from the tip of his cock. He had gotten hard without even touching himself and he wasn't going to last long either.

He fucked Lucas harder, feeling him strain against his lap. The sound of their bodies joining was like a slap, again and again. It didn't take long for Lucas to come. He made a desperate sound, balls drawing up tight against Will's ass.

Will kept going even through the aftershocks, ignoring Lucas' whimpers, the nonsensical, foreign words.

Only when Lucas stared at him as though he was in pain did Will let go, dick spurting hot across Lucas' chest and throat. Marking him.

"Fuck," he murmured, once his breath slowed. Lucas winced as Will pulled off of him, pushing sweaty hair back from his face. His heart was still in his throat.

Lucas' hands had a slight tremor as he pulled off the condom and tied it off.

"Lucas…"

Lucas merely blinked at him, his cheeks red. He brought his hand up to his chest, touching the wet spots where Will had come. He looked lost, and at least somewhat under the influence of painkillers.

Will felt sick.

"I'm sorry, fuck. I hurt you, didn't I?" Will said. Hastily, he reached across the center console again, using his own shirt to wipe Lucas off.

“No, no,” Lucas murmured. “I’m okay. You. But. Are you okay?”

“Stop worrying about me, I'm not the one who -- who--,” he started, but Lucas only looked more wounded. “I’m okay. Thank you.”

Lucas nodded. He gave Will a timid smile. Will got dressed. His hands felt like a stranger’s.

For the first time since Abigail was murdered, Will wanted to cry but he couldn’t. His eyes were dry. There was nothing left for him or for Lucas.

It had been foolish to hope otherwise.

X

When they got to Wolf Trap, Will helped Lucas to his downstairs bed. He was out almost as soon as he was under the sheets. While he slept, Will cleaned up after the dogs and took them on a walk.

He grabbed some baggies of caught fish from the freezer and busied himself with pan-frying it along with a can of stewed tomatoes and okra. Outside, the sun was setting. Earlier, Lucas had woken up and asked for Will’s help to get to the shower. They tied a plastic bag around his cast to keep it from getting wet.

Dinner was the first time they sat face to face since before Lucas went to the hospital. It didn't take long for Will to shove his plate away.

“I owe you an explanation,” Will said. When Lucas started to speak, Will held up his hand. “Please, just hear me out.”

“When we stopped at the park earlier, the girl on the swing, I thought she was someone I knew. I um, got upset when she wasn’t. I took it out on you.”

Lucas blinked, setting his fork down.

“The girl we set free from the window,” he said quietly. His food was mostly uneaten, just rearranged on is plate. “Yes, I remember. We didn’t let her go after all, did we?”

“She’ll never be free,” Will said. “The way everything happened -- it’s impossible.”

“For you or for her? Did she want you to remember her like this, Will?”

Will shook his head. “Choice wasn’t a luxury we were afforded.”

“Will you tell me what happened? I don’t wish to pry but perhaps you should talk about it with someone, someone you can trust.”

“Someone like you,” Will said, his voice barely audible.

Lucas looked down at his plate, silent.

Will took a long sip of wine, leaving his mouth against the cool glass for a long moment. The taste of plum in his pinot noir paired strangely with the bitterness of regret.

“Abigail… she died violently. On my watch. When I could have stopped it.”

“If you could have stopped it you would have,” Lucas said stubbornly. “I can see how you cared for her. When you looked at the photo with me, you had the eyes of a parent. I know how this looks.”

“I cared, but it wasn’t enough. There were -- forces beyond my control. My feelings didn’t matter.”

Lucas looked at him with mournful eyes.

Will sighed. He brought his hand across the table, holding it gently over Lucas’.

“Maybe in another world or life Abigail can be happy,” he said. “It feels like that’s all I can hope for.”

X

Several days passed in relative peace in Wolf Trap. Will did his best to help Lucas. He fed him and kept him flush with good books on everything from fishing to murder mysteries. He even bought an online subscription to a Danish newspaper for Lucas to look at with his laptop. Lucas held daily Skype calls with his son. Will always walked outside with the dogs when they were talking.

Whenever Lucas called his son, a kind of light came into his eyes. He was a good dad.

Lucas always gave detailed recaps too, telling Will various things about his son’s life -- his studies, his mostly frosty relationship with an overbearing mother, a girl in one of his classes that he liked. He asked his dad for advice about that.

Will didn’t let himself think of the long distance charges or his own unpaid medical bills.

Lucas slowly grew accustomed to his cast, needing less and less help. He even quit taking the pills that he was prescribed for pain.

They made arrangements with the airline to change Lucas’ reservation so that Lucas could stay with Will until his follow up appointment at the hospital. Will was wholly supportive, he urged Lucas to stay as long as he liked.

“Perhaps everything that has happened has been for a reason,” Lucas said, a few days after he fell.

It was a cliche that made Will’s stomach churn, but he smiled and nodded, kissing Lucas gently on the lips.

“If that’s what you want to believe.”

At night, they slept together, Lucas' foot propped up by pillows, the dogs snoring around them in nests of blankets and pillows on the floor.

As time limped forward, Will let himself enjoy the fantasy.

X

The glowing candles in Hannibal's dining room lit Hannibal's face from within, leaving his face skull like in the dark. His teeth gleamed beside the flicker of a dozen small flames.

Will sat back in his chair, steepling fingers across his lap.

"You were supposed to come to Italy, Will," Hannibal said. "You were supposed to see the rooms where I could never go."

"No point," Will said, shrugging one shoulder. "The rooms were all empty. You took everything with you."

"You could have left the windows open for me. I would have gone to you."

"No," Will said. "You won't."

Hannibal tilted his head, a small smile curving his mouth. The light illuminated him, every detail brought to life.

Will wanted to trace the smooth line of his jaw, the vulnerable hollow of his throat. He wondered how he could've ever thought Lucas, poor sad Lucas, could ever be enough.

"You would deny me," Hannibal murmured, his voice like a caress. "Deliberately, methodically, you would take everything I have ever wanted from me, wouldn't you, a poor penance for your own desire."

"You should suffer," Will said, soft and dangerous. "You should be judged. If it was up to me, your fate would be far worse."

Hannibal stood up from his chair. He moved soundlessly.

"If you are to be my judge and executioner, would you kiss me before this cruel fate, Will? Would you say goodbye?"

Will could feel the heat of Hannibal's body against his side, though Hannibal made no attempt to touch him. His mouth hovered close, so close that Will could see the dark space between his lips.

"No," Will breathed, turning his face away. "The only touch you will know is my hands cutting off your air. Choking you to death."

Hannibal eyed Will fondly, with only a hint of sadness.

"And people said that I was the monster."

X

Will woke drenched in sweat, chest heaving for air. He needed to breathe-- he needed to get up-- sheets twisted around his legs. He couldn't move.

“Will, Will?”

Hannibal.

Will shoved him down on the bed, pressing his forearm tight against his throat. Hannibal's eyes grew wide, full of fear. Will pushed down harder.

Nails clawed at his arm as he did, gasps choked out.

“Will! Please! It’s me!”

Will blinked. Lucas stared up at him, hair mussed and pleading. Dimly, Will became aware of Lucas’ cast between his legs. The scent of Lucas’ anxiety -- sharp and acrid.

He pulled away from him as rapidly as he could, falling back to his side of the bed. His hands came up to cover his face.

“I’m sorry,” Will said, after a long pause. “Bad dream. Not that it’s a good excuse.”

Lucas was silent on his side of the bed. His breathing sounded more normal than Will’s at least, so Will peeled the sheets back from his legs and got up. The dogs watched with shining, sleepy eyes as Will filled a cup of water from the kitchen sink then brought it back to bed for Lucas to drink.

Lucas accepted the glass, staring at Will warily.

“The nightmare was bad this time,” he stated.

“Yes.”

“Abigail?”

“No… it was about Hannibal.”

“I still remind you of him.”

Will let his gaze fall to Lucas’ neck. The red marks from his choke hold were still there. They would likely bruise.

“Yes,” Will said. “You do remind me. Of Hannibal. I understand if you want to go home.”

“I can’t just abandon you, Will,” Lucas said.

“Abandonment implies expectation. I have none.” Will frowned to himself. “No, I guess that’s not true, is it? I have expectations but none of them end with what *should be*.”

At Lucas' worried expression Will laughed, a dry, clipped sound.

"I'm sick. Mentally ill. I know it. Everyone has been trying to tell me and now I finally know it."

"Don't talk like that," Lucas said. "You're not-- broken. You're good to me. You help me. I've been better since I came here."

Will didn't speak. He sat on the edge of the bed, facing Lucas.

"I don't deserve you."

Lucas reached out from the dark. He touched Will's cheek with the lightest of touches.

"When this cast comes off I'm going to take care of you, okay? We'll go to Denmark, but somewhere where no one knows either of us. We'll go sailing, and fishing, everything you like."

"Will we hunt?" Will asked.

"Only if you want to."

Will imagined it, the unending forest of gold and red, trees looming over them like destiny, long hands of the clock. Hannibal would be there, waiting. Will felt the cold metal of the rifle in his hand.

"I don't think I have the stomach for it these days," Will said. Lucas wrapped an arm around him and nudged him forward, into the solid warmth of his chest.

"You wouldn't have to," he said solemnly. "Not if you didn't want. Never."

X

When Will woke up, his mind was still unsettled by his dream of Hannibal. It had soured overnight like milk.

He made Lucas pancakes for breakfast. It was something he hadn't attempted since the last Christmas he spent with his dad -- years ago. A few of the flapjacks ended up burned. He made sure those ended up on his plate.

Lucas woke up when the coffee was brewing, Walmart brand arabica -- nothing special. Will was both envious and impressed by Lucas' ability to sleep like the dead, a full seven hours.

He was still rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he came to the table, crutches tucked under his arms. He surveyed the homemade, uneven cakes with a small smile.

"You made these?" Lucas asked.

"Don't get too excited. I haven't made pancakes in a long time."

“Pancakes though. Very American. Different from what we normally eat for breakfast.”

Will sipped from his mug. “Used to make ‘em for my dad growing up,” he said. “That was before he would go work on the boats on the weekends. Then we ate fish for dinner. Mostly whatever I caught after school or after work. Every place I lived before moving to Virginia was by the water.”

“You cooked for me the night I fell. I can still remember the smell of the fish and spices.”

There was a pang in Will’s chest. The memory came without permission, tender as a bruise. In his mind's eye, he saw his foot extended again. Lucas went over it, stumbling forward with his leg turned out.

Lucas cut out a forkful of pancake. He made a noise of pleasure as he savored his first bite, chewing it slowly.

Will did the same.

“The syrup, it's very good!” Lucas said. “From here?”

“There are some sugar maple trees nearby, but most of the store-brand stuff is from Canada.”

“What do the trees nearby look like?”

“The leaves are beautiful in autumn. Like a sunset. We’re right past peak season.”

“I would like to see those one day,” Lucas said wistfully. “I loved going out on the boat and seeing the harbor.”

Will poked at his pancake with the dull tips of his fork before he slid his plate away.

“There's no reason you should be stuck in here all day,” Will said.

Lucas glanced at him, puzzled. “What do you suggest?”

“A drive?”

Lucas blushed. Even the tops of his ears turned pink. The same memory had surfaced in both of their minds at the same time -- Will felt what Lucas did, clear and vivid as the crime scenes Jack once sent him to. The car was cramped, Lucas’ large hand spanning the small of his back. Will’s eyes were open, blue and bottomless and Lucas wanted to drown --

Warm, tight. So tight.

He felt his own face warm.

“No, no, not like that,” Will said, looking down at his plate. “I didn’t mean. I wouldn't --”

“It wasn't bad,” Lucas said, looking down at his syrup-submerged breakfast. “What happened. I didn't mean that. Will. Please.”

“Okay,” Will exhaled. They fell silent.

“Then, just a drive,” Will offered. “There're some nice parks nearby. Quiet.”

“I'd like that. The pain is less… how you say? It doesn't move as much up my leg.”

Will nodded. “Radiating. That’s what we call it. Do you need help getting ready?”

“No,” Lucas said. “I'll manage.”

But his face said otherwise.

“What’s wrong?” Will asked.

Lucas hesitated. “Did -- I do something wrong?”

Will tensed. “Why would you ask that?”

“We haven't done more than kiss for almost a week. If it's my pain that concerns you… I assure you, it's not a problem. But if it's something else?”

“It’s not.”

“Oh,” Lucas said.

Will leaned forward and pressed his lips to Lucas’.

“There’s nothing wrong. A drive will do us good. If you don’t mind waiting in the car I can run into the grocery store and pick up some stuff for dinner. We can drive through Great Falls. You haven’t seen that yet, have you?”

Lucas shook his head.

“Good,” Will said. “I think you’ll like it.”

They both started to get ready. Lucas went into the bathroom while Will did the dishes. He was almost done when the phone rang.

He wiped his hand off on an old towel and answered it.

“Will,” Alana said. She sounded breathless.

“Alana.”

“When’s the last time you logged on to TattleCrime?” she asked.

“Not very recently. I make it a point to not contribute to Freddie Lounds’ ad revenue,” Will said. “What is it?”

“There’s -- there’s photos of you at the hospital with someone she’s calling Hannibal’s twin all over it. The headline is, and I quote, “*Twisted Ex-Agent in Love with Cannibal Killer’s*

Twin."

Shit.

"Will?" Alana's voice was faint, but panicked. She sounded like she was in her car. "Should I come over?"

"Lucas isn't Hannibal's twin," he said.

"Well, who is he? What the *hell* is going on?"

"Why don't you ask Jack. You always do."

Will hung up.

He had already figured out why the images of him and Lucas at the hospital showed up on Freddie's website a week after the fact. He wasn't going to spell it out to Alana.

Jack hadn't left the hunt after all.

X

Will took Lucas to the Maryland side of Great Falls, knowing it was more accessible. He paid the $10 fee to get inside the park. They trudged along a short, crowded path, Will watching every step Lucas took. He had his crutches for balance. Soon, they could both hear the muted roar of the falls.

At the overlook, they stood among the jostling crowds, looking out together. The Potomac River rushed down the jagged rocks set in the cliffs. Below the falls was the narrow Mather Gorge. It only looked calm. The currents ran strong and chaotic below the surface, just as furious as the white-water sections upstream.

Freddie's article still played on a loop in his mind.

Rumor has it that former FBI special agent Will Graham turned down all psychological and psychiatric aid after being gutted by Hannibal Lecter last year. Insiders at the bureau say he's a broken man, hardened and incapable of love or forgiveness, much less serving his country by putting more dangerous killers behind bars.

But is he the one that should be behind bars?

Insiders still maintain Graham's innocence and profess trauma is what has kept Graham from returning to the bureau to continue the particular brand of profiling work that he is known for. But is there more to the story? Graham was spotted recently at Inova Fairfax with a mysterious stranger, one that looks incredibly similar to the FBI's Most Wanted cannibal, Dr. Hannibal Lecter.

The stranger and Graham were remarkably cozy, even to a seasoned journalist's eyes.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Isn't that the expression?

X

They returned home just before dark. Will helped Lucas up the porch then ran back outside for the small bag of groceries, just a bag of spinach along with some produce, in case Lucas got hungry. Will didn't think he could eat.

Still, he put the cucumbers and tomatoes in the crisper section of his fridge. He washed his hands at the sink, using his wet fingers to push unruly hair back from his eyes.

When he went into the living room, all Lucas had to do was take one look at his face.

"Will. What is it? Please tell me."

Will shuddered, he couldn't quite stop the sway to his feet. "I need help," he said. "I need to get over the past. I need to move on."

"I can help you," Lucas said. "Whatever you need."

"I can't ask you to--"

"Yes, you can," Lucas said.

Will nodded, his eyes blurring as he looked down at his scuffed boots.

"Will."

It was the tone of his voice, the authority in it that snapped Will to attention.

He went to his closet. At the far back was the suit he had taken from Hannibal's that day he had run into Alana in Baltimore.

He brought the clothes to Lucas.

"These clothes were Hannibal's," Will said. "I need -- I need--"

Lucas put his hand over Will's. His compassion was real. "It would help you if I wore these?"

Will nodded. "I don't know. I think so. I can't say for sure."

Lucas squeezed his palm gently. "If I can change my clothes to help you, I will. It's worth it. I'll wear anything you want, you don't have to ask."

"I'm sorry this is so fucked up. That I'm so fucked up."

"If I do what you tell me, you'll be happy, yes?" Lucas said.

"Yes."

"All right. Then I'll do it."

"Thank you."

Will didn't respond. He went back into the kitchen to pour himself three-fingers worth of whiskey. He emptied his glass hastily, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

He sat at the table and looked out the window, watching the birds sail low over the colorless fields. It seemed like he sat still for a long time, but in reality he knew it was probably closer to twenty minutes. He shut the dogs in the room before he went back to his bedroom.

Lucas was sitting on the edge of the bed now. He wore Hannibal's clothing. Though the suit was wrinkled, the dark colors suited him. It wasn't as tapered to him as it would have been on Hannibal but Will appreciated the view, the way the jacket hugged his shoulders and narrow waist. The pants, well Lucas had tried, but he hadn't been able to get it over his cast without tearing the seam. Will didn't care. He wanted and needed entirely too much that it was impossible to know even where to begin.

Lucas' gaze drifted up Will's body, his hair falling across his eyes. He stared at Will, unblinking, absorbing his reaction.

"Do you like me?" he asked.

"*Yes,*" Will said, but he had no idea what the question truly referred to, if it was a question if he liked Lucas or if he liked Lucas more as Hannibal.

"How should I…"

Will was grateful for the whiskey singing through his veins.

"I need you more undone. Can you unbutton your shirt?"

Lucas swallowed, then, very slowly undid each pearly button of Hannibal's white dress shirt all the way to his waist.

"Leave it on," Will said, when Lucas made a move to remove the dress shirt completely.

Lucas stilled his hands, waiting. Will circled him where he sat on the bed. Unnameable emotions surfaced, dark and consuming. He couldn't stop from climbing onto Lucas lap, kissing him hungrily. Lucas kissed him back, and for a moment it didn't matter that the taste and smell was wrong, that Lucas wasn't who he wanted. It didn't last. His appetite went unwhet.

He pushed Lucas flat on his stomach with one hand. His hands went to the front of him, flicking the button on the pants before he tugged them down the legs then over the cast. He thought he heard the seam rip again, but it didn't matter. He was dismantling Hannibal in his mind, thread by thread.

The long, lean lines of Lucas' back fit smoothly beneath Will's hands. Lucas' head was down on the pillow, so Will couldn't see his face. Will touched the bare curve of shoulder, the crease of his spine. He took off his pants, thinking to himself.

There was an old tube of lubricant in the nightstand and he paused to retrieve it. He took his time lubricating his finger, drawing it down the cleft of Lucas' ass and stroking the warm

skin.

When his finger pushed in, Lucas was hot and tight. It seemed impossible to squeeze more than a finger inside, though Will logically knew more would fit. The last time he had done this with Nate there has been a six-pack of beer and lots of lube. He remembered the actions, how he and Nate had slotted together like pieces of a machine but not the sensations of it, how it felt. The memory seemed blurry and insignificant, an old leaf floating down the rapid chaos of white water.

He squeezed more lube on his fingers-- pushing two into Lucas' hole this time, feeling the stretch and give of his muscle. He crooked his fingers the way he liked, listening to Lucas soft breathing.

"Turn around."

Lucas rolled over and Will stared at him, the checkered suit as dark as raven's wings across the white sheets of his bed. Lucas' cock was only half-hard, rising up to his belly as Will surveyed him.

"Will-"

"Shhh," Will said. He leaned forward to nuzzle Lucas' cock, scenting the thatch of pubic hair, the salty skin below his balls, open mouthed and breathless. Lucas whimpered, falling silent only when Will began to suck him, cheeks hollowed and tight around his shaft. He took him as deep as he could, pulling back only to breathe and do it again.

While he sucked, he pressed his two of his fingers into Lucas' tight hole again -- searching and rubbing until Lucas gave a hoarse cry. When Lucas tensed, bitter pre-seminal fluid leaked against the back of Will's throat. Will sucked and sucked, relentless.

"Oh God-- that's-- I'm close."

Only then did Will pull away, wiping at his mouth. He stared at Lucas' collarbone, the naked dip of skin and bone.

"I want to fuck you."

Lucas swallowed. His eyes drifted down the tails of Will's shirt to his erect cock.

"Okay," he said, nodding once. "Yes."

Will upended the bottle of lube over his cock, making it slick. He fisted himself twice, though he needed no real encouragement. Lucas' long legs were falling off the bed and Will fit perfectly between them, just as he imagined he would fit between Hannibal's legs. He tucked Lucas' legs towards his chest and brought his cock against Lucas' asshole. Lip snagged between his teeth, he rocked forward in tiny motions until the swollen head of his cock pushed inside Lucas' hole.

For one long moment there was nothing but the sound of Lucas' shuddering breath. Then Will pressed deeper, felt the the stretch of Lucas open around him, the warm, slick inside. He

sank deep, inch by inch, forearms trembling.

Lucas brought his hands to Will's shoulders, gripping them firmly until he bottomed out. He gave Lucas only a second to adjust before he moved slightly, pushing back and then in again. Lucas shifted with him, legs widening to take what was given.

"Will, it's good," he moaned. "So -- oh -- good."

And it was good. Only that voice. It wasn't *right*. The stubbled line of Lucas' jaw lacked the sharpness of Hannibal's clean shaven one. His eyes were too soft, his hands too gentle. Will made a frustrated sound, kissing Lucas quiet so he could concentrate.

He forced himself to keep his pace. To keep fucking him harder, until his thrusts grew quick--furious, feverish snaps of his hips. Lucas' cock bobbed untouched between them, and Will wanted to touch him but he couldn't. He couldn't breathe, couldn't think about anything but --

Velvet tines snapping like dry sticks. Fingers wrapping tight around his throat. His or Hannibal's? The image was hazy, indistinct. There was the fading scent of ambergris and almonds. Blood spilling hot between them.

Hannibal.

He had no way of knowing if he spoke aloud. Something like lightning crackled through him.

He closed his eyes when he came, felt the violent rush of his semen fill Lucas. Lucas cried out from the dark and Will felt him pulse wet across his cheek and shirt.

It was over in seconds.

Will gently disengaged, letting Lucas' legs fall back down to the bed.

They curled loosely together, their breaths slowing. Will's gut lurched uneasily at the sight of Lucas' ass, the tender, pink abused skin, semen trailing down the back of his thigh. Hannibal's shirt was still hung from Lucas' arms. There was something so perverse about it, something unshakably wrong.

Will pulled a sheet over their bodies. He saw the wet tear marks shimmering on Lucas' face.

Will pressed his face against Lucas' shoulder in silence, neither of them speaking. It felt like a goodbye. It felt like the end.

X

The empty quiet woke him first.

Will stretched, pushing back the sheets and blankets wrapped cocoon-like around him. Odd. He was wearing boxers but he didn't remember putting them on last night. He put his hand on his scar, the thick smile stretching across his navel.

Something was wrong. He didn't take his shirt off. He had never taken his shirt off in front of Lucas.

He touched Lucas' empty side of the bed, it was cool.

The inside of Will's arm itched, as if a mosquito had bit him. He scratched the skin as he got out of bed and looked around.

Morning light slanted through his window but his mouth was dry as if he had been asleep for days, not one night.

Lucas' crutches were against the wall. His suitcase was beside the bed, a few pieces of clothing hanging out. Will fingered one of the frumpy scarves. He looked around the empty bedroom again, a strange forbidding sensation clenching his stomach when he saw the ruined suit that Lucas had worn last night, *Hannibal's suit*, was left folded on his desk.

Somehow he knew Lucas was gone. There was a strange stillness around the house that didn't go away even as he explored the living room. Lucas' sweater and books were on the seats of various chairs, untouched, the same as they were last night. The door to the kitchen was open, the dogs were gone, each of their beds empty. Had Lucas and the dogs gone on a walk?

But Lucas' crutches were by the bed. There was no way he would've been able to walk them anywhere without them.

Will itched again at his arm. The swell of irritated skin was looking less like a mosquito bite and more like something else entirely.

A memory tugged on him from the darker depths of his mind -- Hannibal's office, flickering, dim lighting -- the taste of sweet wine on his tongue. Rosé. Hannibal was on his knees before him, something -- ravenous in his eyes. He traced the big blue vein in Will's inner arm before he smoothly slid the needle inside.

Will tried to swallow but couldn't. The memory tightened around his throat, squeezing at him like a fist. His palms grew damp. The little red mark on his arm wasn't a bug bite. It was a needle puncture.

He left the kitchen. Short, halting steps took him back to the living room.

Abigail was there, looking out the window, into the driveway beyond. She was smiling.

Will looked out through the glass with her.

At first, there was nothing but mist, the sun rising past the blankets of trees.

Hannibal was outside, wearing dark clothes and walking slowly across the field. Will's dogs leapt and frolicked around him in the tall grass. They all recognized him as if he was a long-lost member of the pack, as if there was lost time to make up for. Winston ran ahead of them all, almost to the house.

Will tried to still his shaking hands. He pressed them tightly against his desk until he couldn't feel them anymore.

"Happy now?"

The voice was Abigail's -- silky and amused.

Will didn't respond. He waited until Hannibal opened the front door, the light of the rising sun spilling in like gold. The dogs came in too, around and in between Hannibal's legs, tails wagging and thumping on the various chairs Will kept in his living room. Their wet noses touched everywhere, Will's bare legs, his clenched fingers, until slowly feeling returned, his hands closing and unclosing.

Hannibal stood still at the doorway as if frozen.

"Will," he said softly. He came closer, tentative but unafraid.

"I waited for you in Italy," he said. "I left you a gift in the Cappella Palatina. Why didn't you come?"

"Where's Lucas?"

"Ah," Hannibal said, pausing. "I regret to inform you, he's gone. Perhaps in pursuit of more suitable pastures."

"Did you kill him?"

Hannibal smiled thinly. "No, though I confess it was a temptation."

"You expect me to believe that he's alive?"

Hannibal twitched, almost imperceptibly. He hid it by smoothing away invisible wrinkles in his pants.

"I knew it would displease you so for now he is more valuable to me alive. Besides, he provided me with a free passport. They're expensive on the black market. I suppose it's useful to have a doppelganger."

"Where is he, Hannibal?"

"I left him at one of my properties in Virginia. I needed to create a diversion. Ms. Lounds' article made quite the stir. Lucas is merely -- incapacitated until we have left the country. Until I can take you home. Then I will make an anonymous call to the authorities."

Will couldn't, wouldn't, hide his agony -- or his relief.

"Home?" he asked. His voice cracked the word into two syllables.

Hannibal looked at him tenderly, daring to take another step closer. Light slanted across his features, illuminating it from the shadows. Will could see the face he had ached for, finally.

He could see how absence had left its mark on Hannibal as well, in the tired set of his eyes, the small wrinkles across his forehead.

“Yes, home,” Hannibal said. “I have found it for you. For us. I had to leave Florence but there’s a quiet place we can rest until it’s safe, in Sinaia.”

“Where?”

“Romania. The south-central region to be precise. A cabin in the woods, lost in a white sea of snow-covered Beech forests. The lights are on, Will.”

In his mind, Will saw it. He saw it and wanted.

“Any minute now an associate I have hired will arrive to pick up the dogs. Once it is safe, they will all be brought to us. You have my word.”

“And Lucas?”

“Once we leave the country, I’ll call the authorities -- Jack, if you prefer.”

Will shivered.

“Come,” Hannibal said.

Will went to him.

Hannibal held him tight, nestling Will to his chest. His cheek pressed to the crown of Will's head.

“It's time,” he murmured. “You've been far too alone, my dear. Haven't you?”

The room of Will’s grief unlocked. He saw Abigail there, waiting. He felt her goodbye, a cool kiss on his brow.

Will wept, fingers clawed into Hannibal's bones.

End Notes

Send me stuff at EmCWrites on Tumblr.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!